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| Remarks: <p>These two memoranda are in response to questions which you address to Carl Duckett in the course of a briefing some days back.</p> <p>Since your questions were squarely within the area of National Intelligence Estimates we, rather than Carl, have undertaken the response.</p> <p>We propose no distribution other than yourself, Mr. Helms, and Mr. Duckett for his file.</p> | | | |
| FOLD HERE TO RETURN TO SENDER | | | |
| FROM: NAME, ADDRESS AND PHONE NO. | | | DATE |
| Sherman Kent 7 E 48 | | | 2 Aug 65 |
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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Mr. Helms

DATE: 27 December 1965

FROM : Sherman Kent

SUBJECT:

Cy Vance, who had received our Memorandum to the Director (dated 27 November) on a similar subject, asked us last Thursday to prepare the attached memorandum (Tab A), and to have it furnished to him by noon on 28 December. If it seems to you to be in order, will you send it on to him. A draft memorandum of transmittal is also attached (Tab B).

Other relevant papers are the 27 November memorandum (Tab C) and the Vance request (Tab D).

SHERMAN KENT

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Cyrus R. Vance
Deputy Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT: 1. Probable Reactions to US Bombing Attacks
on POL Targets in North Vietnam
(a) On POL Bulk Storage and Handling
Facilities at Haiphong
(b) On These and the Seven or Eight Other
Bulk Storage Facilities at the Rate of
About Two a Week

1. Attached are two copies of a memorandum on the above subject, prepared by the Board of National Estimates. As you will recall, this memorandum was undertaken in response to your request.

2. The memorandum was drafted without reference to any "pause" in the bombing of North Vietnam such as is now the subject of various speculative press articles.

RICHARD HELMS
Acting Director

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TS#185917

27 December 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ACTING DIRECTOR

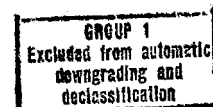
SUBJECT: Probable Reactions to US Bombing Attacks on POL Targets in North Vietnam

- (a) On POL Bulk Storage and Handling Facilities at Haiphong
- (b) On These and the Seven or Eight Other Bulk Storage Facilities at the Rate of About Two a Week

A. Attack on the Haiphong Facilities

1. Communist Reactions. Since early November, the so-called "sanctuary" area around Haiphong and Hamoi has been attacked a number of times. At first strikes were made only on rail and highway bridges and SAM sites; more recently, the bombing raids on the Uong Bi power plant signalled extension of the active target list to industrial sites within the previously exempted area. Thus, the Communists must be expecting that the POL facilities will come under attack before very long, and such an attack would not greatly surprise them. They would, however, see it as a sign that the US is

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determined, in the absence of a satisfactory response from the Communist side, to extend the scope of its attacks and that, despite Communist hopes, international and US domestic pressures had not sufficed to prevent such action.

2. Destruction of the storage tanks and bulk unloading equipment at Haiphong would substantially increase the Communists' logistic problems and force them to improvise alternate POL import and distribution channels. These could include, subject to the hazards of interdiction, the use of rail or highway tankers and the transport of POL in drums by road, rail, or coastal shipping. The DRV is already increasing its use of drums because this facilitates dispersal and concealment. However, handling POL this way also requires greater expenditures of time and effort, and very large numbers of drums. Resort to these methods would necessitate transshipping through Chinese ports or transport directly across China by rail, which would in turn not only involve physical delays and difficulties but also increase the DRV's political problems in arranging for the passage of Soviet supplies through China.

- 2 -

TOP SECRET

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3. The loss of stored POL and the dislocation of the distribution system would add appreciably to the DRV's difficulties in supplying the Communist forces in the South. However, we have estimated that the Communist effort in South Vietnam, at present levels of combat, does not depend on imports of POL into the South and requires only relatively small tonnages of other supplies (say 12 tons per day, on an annual basis). Accordingly, we believe that adequate quantities of supplies would continue to move by one means or another to the Communist forces in South Vietnam, though the supplies would not move as fast and it would hence require more to keep the pipeline filled. In any case, military logistic requirements would certainly receive priority over civilian needs.

4. The economy would suffer appreciably from the resultant disruption of transportation. This, along with the recent damage to the Ung Bi power plant, would somewhat curtail the output of the DRV's modest industrial establishment and complicate the problems of internal distribution. Hanoi would have to consider the possibility that the bombing of this waterfront facility might further discourage international shipping from calling there, and the regime would have to bear the psychological burden of facing still further intensification of bombing with no clear end in sight. However, we do not believe that destruction of the Haiphong facilities would cause a major change in policy on the Communist side, either toward negotiations or toward sharply enlarging the war.

- 3 -

TOP SECRET
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5. Although there presumably is a point at which one more turn of the screw would crack the enemy resistance to negotiations, past experience indicates that we are unlikely to have clear evidence when that point has been reached. The Communist bid for negotiations in Korea, for example, came very abruptly. In any case, though granting that each increase of pressure on the DRV bears with it the possibility it may be decisive, we do not believe the bombing of the Haiphong facility is likely to have such an effect. If the US were to announce that there would be a pause before other installations were attacked, Hanoi would probably consider the announcement an ultimatum and stiffen its resistance to negotiations.

6. The DRV is limited in its capability to respond to the air attacks. It would attempt to minimize its losses through passive defense, and it would use its AAA and SAM capabilities in an effort to make the attacks costly for the US. If it had sufficient tactical warning, it might decide at this point to use its own fighter capability against the US aircraft, but we believe the odds are against it. Certainly it would seek Soviet and Chinese help to improve its air-defense capabilities and to provide further logistical help.

- 4 -

TOP SECRET

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7. It is also possible, though unlikely, that the Communists would respond to the bombing of the Haiphong POL facilities with direct Chinese participation in the war. The DRV might request the intervention of Chinese fighters, operating from Chinese bases, but we consider it unlikely that such fighters would be forthcoming. The Chinese air force is ill-equipped to engage in sustained combat with US air forces, and is unlikely to undertake such a contest. As for the sending of large numbers of Chinese ground combat forces into North Vietnam, we do not think that the DRV would request, or the Chinese volunteer, such action. Nevertheless, the Chinese probably would provide additional military support units to assist in coping with the increased problems of supply and transport resulting from the US attacks. The Chinese would almost certainly urge Hanoi to continue and intensify the general struggle.

8. Moscow's problems and frustrations would be aggravated. The destruction of the Haiphong facilities would further dramatize the inadequacy of the air-defense capabilities provided by the Soviets and expose Moscow to increased Chinese polemics. The difficulties of continuing the supply

- 5 -

TOP SECRET

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of Soviet POL to the DRV would cause further embarrassment. Most of North Vietnam's POL comes by sea, and, since early 1965, all ocean shipments have been delivered by Soviet tankers. In addition, though little Soviet military equipment enters by sea, important quantities of dry cargo also arrive in Soviet ships. Although the destruction of the Haiphong facility would make it impractical to handle tankers, we believe that Soviet dry cargo ships would continue to arrive despite the danger of further bombing of Haiphong. The Soviets would almost certainly send further air-defense equipment to the DRV and help make up for the loss of POL and the POL handling and storage facilities, but at the same time they would probably press Hanoi to negotiate.

9. Soviet-US relations would almost certainly deteriorate further because of the increased difficulties the bombing would cause Moscow. If Soviet ships were hit during the postulated attack, the Soviets would almost certainly believe it was deliberate. Such a mishap would probably have a considerable political impact in Moscow, where it would tend to weaken the case for retaining a modicum of good relations with the US. Although we do not believe the Soviets would resort to major violence, they might signal their increased hostility

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by specific, limited acts such as attacking US ferret planes or interfering with access to Berlin.

10. Reactions in the Non-Communist World. In general the world is getting inured to the Vietnam war. Bombing of the Haiphong POL facilities would be regarded by much of the world's informed opinion as an attack on a legitimate military target. Nevertheless, the target can be readily depicted as closely associated with a major DRV population center, and public opinion throughout the world would almost certainly be exploited by Communist claims of extensive civilian casualties. Those governments or segments of opinion which already condemn US policy in Vietnam would have another occasion for doing so. But no government which supports US policy in Vietnam, however reluctantly, would be likely to turn against the US because of the bombing.

B. Destruction of All the Main POL Facilities

11. The Haiphong facility is by far the most important and most sensitive target among North Vietnam's POL installations, and the closest to a major city. Thus, attacks on the other facilities would be of secondary importance. If the US went

- 7 -

TOP SECRET

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ahead with the systematic destruction of the other facilities despite whatever reactions the Haiphong attacks had aroused, it would be a further indication of US determination. Although the impact of the loss of the POL stored in these facilities might be mitigated somewhat if substantial quantities of POL had been dispersed in other forms of storage, the loss would add appreciably to DRV/VC logistic problems and strains on the economy. These would be matters of degree, however, and would be unlikely to bring reactions from either the Communists or the rest of the world appreciably different from those discussed above in the case of Haiphong alone.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

- 8 -

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